翻了一秋天粪肥，我懂了什么叫底子

初三的秋天，我在爷爷家帮了一个秋天的忙，主要一件事：沤肥、翻肥、下肥。那堆粪肥又脏又沉，我一开始捏着鼻子干，干到后来却从里头尝出了道理，治好了我写文章的毛病。

十月初，爷爷把菜园收空的秧子、烂菜叶、秸秆和粪肥堆在墙角，一层一层码，浇上水，让我每星期翻一遍。翻堆是个苦活，粪叉插进去，底下的翻上来，臭气熏人，翻一遍出一身汗。我问爷爷为什么不直接把粪埋到地里种菜，省事。爷爷说：生粪下地会烧根，秧子不烂就是死物，肥力沤不出来。地要吃的是沤透的肥，不是看着一堆东西埋进去就算数。

我翻了一个多月，眼看着那堆东西变了样：秸秆软了，烂叶化了，颜色从杂色变成黑褐，抓一把攥紧又松开，散成松散的末，闻着不臭了，倒有一股泥土味。爷爷抓了一把撒进地里，说：这叫熟肥，下去就养根。下过熟肥的那半块地，冬天种上的菠菜，叶子肥厚，绿得压秤。

那段时间我的周记正被语文老师批：内容空洞，堆话，没有一句实在的。我不服气，我背了好词好句，怎么就空洞了？有天我蹲在粪堆边吃饭盒，看着那把黑褐的熟肥，忽然被它点醒：我的好词好句就是生粪。背的时候挺多，全浮在面上，没有沤进生活里，下笔的时候烧不了自己的根，只能熏人。爷爷的地不认生肥，阅卷的老师也不认生词。

从那以后我不再急着堆好词。我学爷爷沤肥的法子：把看过的书、村里的事、菜园里的活，一层一层码进心里，每星期在周记里翻一遍，把没沤透的废话翻出去，把真事实感沤进去。周记从一页变两页，再变三页，全是自己的事。期末语文考了一百零二分，老师批了四个字：有根了，好。

中考前最后一个周末，爷爷在园子里下最后一茬肥，我帮他翻。他腰不如从前，我抢过粪叉翻，他在旁边扶叉。翻完他抓一把肥闻了闻，点头：沤透了。我站在原地，忽然觉得这句话也在说我。一个秋天的粪肥教会我：世上没有直接埋进去就能养人的东西，学问要沤透，经历要沤透，人才有底子。这个底子，往后我走到哪里都带着。

After an Autumn of Turning Compost I Learned What a Foundation Means

In the autumn of my ninth grade year, I helped at grandpa home for a whole autumn, mostly one task: composting, turning the pile, and applying it. The compost heap was filthy and heavy; at first I pinched my nose through it, and by the end I had tasted a truth out of it that cured the emptiness of my writing.

In early October, grandpa stacked the spent vines, rotten leaves, and straw from the cleared garden against the wall, layer upon layer with water poured on, and told me to turn the pile once a week. Turning was brutal work: drive the pitchfork in, bring the bottom up on top, stench in your face, one turn and you are drenched in sweat. I asked why not just bury the manure straight into the ground and plant, saving trouble. Grandpa said raw manure burned the roots, and unrotted vines are dead

matter; their fertility stays locked in composting. What the soil eats is fully rotted fertilizer, not a pile of things buried to look like it counts.

I turned that pile for over a month and watched it change: the straw went soft, the rotten leaves melted away, the color shifted from motley to dark brown. Grab a handful, squeeze, release, and it crumbles into loose crumb; the stink was gone, replaced by the smell of earth. Grandpa took a handful and scattered it into the plot: this is ripe fertilizer; it feeds roots the moment it goes in. On the half-plot dressed with it, the winter spinach grew thick-leaved and green enough to weigh heavy on a scale.

Around that time my weekly journals kept drawing this comment from the language teacher: empty content, stacked phrases, not one solid sentence. I resented it. I had memorized fine phrases; how could I be empty? One day I squatted by the compost heap eating my lunch box, watching that dark brown ripe fertilizer, and it struck me awake: my fine phrases were raw manure. Plenty in memory, all floating on the surface, never rotted into my own life; when I wrote, they burned my own roots and only stank at people. Grandpa soil does not recognize raw fertilizer, and a grading teacher does not recognize raw phrases.

After that I stopped rushing to pile up fine words. I adopted grandpa composting method: stack the books I read, the doings of the village, the work in the garden, layer by layer into my heart, then turn it all once a week in my journal, throwing out the talk that had not rotted through, letting real events and true feeling compost in. My journals grew from one page to two, then three, all my own doings. On the finals I scored one hundred and two in language, and the teacher wrote four characters: roots now, good.

On the last weekend before the entrance exam, grandpa applied the final round of fertilizer in the plot, and I helped him turn it. His back was not what it had been, so I took the pitchfork and turned while he steadied it. When we finished he took a handful, sniffed, and nodded: fully rotted. Standing there, I felt the words were also about me. One autumn of compost taught me that nothing in this world nourishes a person straight from the heap; knowledge must be rotted through, experience must be rotted through, and only then does a person have a foundation. That foundation I will carry wherever I go.